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NARRATIVE

Fitchburg,
" Congreg."

OF THE

IGIOUS CONTROVERSY

IN

essions FITCHBURG.

WITH COMMENTS ON A PAMPHLET,

ENTITLED

"FACTS AND DOCUMENTS," &c.

Published by the CHURCH under the late care of the Rev. SAMUEL
WORCESTER, and general Remarks.

*The work is designed to defend the rights of private
Christians, to advance the order, and strengthen
the connexion of the Churches.*

vol 1

WORCESTER :

From the Press of Isaiah Thomas, Jun.

SEPTEMBER—1804.

LM

At a regular meeting of the CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH in Fitchburg, August 19,

VOTED, to adjourn this meeting to this instant ; then to be held at the
and to request the Rev. FRANCIS GARDNER of Leominster, to officiate as Moderator.
EDWARD DURANT, Moderator.

FITCHBURG, August 23, 1804.

Met agreeably to adjournment.

VOTED, UNANIMOUSLY, That the following Pamphlet, containing a Narrative of the RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSY in this State, with Strictures on a Publication of the same, lately under the care of the Rev. SAMUEL WORCESTER, entitled, "FACTS and DOCUMENTS, &c." with other General Remarks, be printed.

Attest,

FRANCIS GARDNER, Moderator pro tem.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE members of the Congregational Church in Fitchburg have long known, that impressions rested on the public mind unfriendly to their reputation and Christian sincerity. These impressions were partly originated and kept alive by a publication, sanctioned by the Church, lately under the care of the Reverend SAMUEL WORCESTER. We were convinced, that this pamphlet, entitled "Facts and Documents," &c. exhibited the air of plausibility, and that it was reasonable for persons, who perused it, to expect a reply. From prudential motives we have for a long time observed silence. We ardently desired the restoration of union. We chose rather to suffer as individuals in the estimation of many honest minds, than by publishing to prolong a dissention, which had proved greatly detrimental to our social and religious interests. After the removal of the Pastor, we cherished raised hopes of a termination of the dispute, and that our Christian brethren would have manifested reasonable condescension. These hopes are disappointed.—We were by the unreasonable exactions and

measures of those, with whom we were formerly connected, constrained to appeal to an Ecclesiastical Council for advice and direction. Under their inspection and auspices we renewed the covenant, to which we formerly consented, and have adverted to the title of "the Congregational Church in Fitchburg." The existing state of things gives little room to hope for a coalescence. We now feel obliged fairly to represent the case, and to lay our vindication before the public. We shall wait the decision, which will result from the impartiality, wisdom and candor of our fellow Christians, with a humble hope, that in their judgment, considering our perplexed state, we shall stand acquitted. We hesitate not to say, that feeling incompetent to prepare a narrative, which might represent facts, we have solicited such aid in the arrangement of the materials for publication, as we thought necessary.



NARRATIVE OF A RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSY.

IN the call and ordination of the Rev. SAMUEL WORCESTER, there was a general union of the inhabitants of this town. A few dissented. Some of these appeared before the ordaining council, with a formal protest against their proceeding. We acknowledge, that most of us were among his warm and zealous supporters. Altho' it evidently appeared, that in his construction of some Christian doctrines he differed from sentiments we had before cherished ; yet we believed him a man of good natural and acquired abilities, possessed of the Christian temper, and we expected edification and comfort from his pastoral services.

In common with other churches, this had great reasons to acknowledge many symptoms of lukewarmness and declension. Far from presuming to boast of our purity, we believe that in the interior regulations and

discipline of this church there was not any extraordinary deficiency.

On mature deliberation, the great body of professing believers admit the inutility and dangerous tendency of two Christian covenants. In the gospel there appears nothing to countenance them. Parents have been led by their adoption to entertain gross errors. Desirous of expressing an affection to their offspring, by having them early initiated into the Christian church, they have complied with the customary modes, and considered their obligations cancelled. Soon after the coming of a Savior, repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, were the prescribed terms of admission to all Christian privileges. The introduction of what is entitled the half-way covenant, is viewed by us as an invention of man, and unworthy of being retained in any church, professedly established "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets."

Many weighty reasons gained a general consent to the proposal of the Pastor, to revise the church covenant. The hints relating to this subject by one of the Christian fathers in our country are highly reasonable.* By him it was thought expedient for Christians, who often require new incentives to vigilance and piety, to adopt this salutary method, to promote their spiritual improvement. An

* Matther.

united recognition of their covenant engagements tends to enliven in believers the decaying principle of religion, and to advance the best interests of human society.

In our opinion, confessions of faith and the covenant used in the admission of members should breathe the spirit and language of the gospel. In the essentials of Christianity there is an universal agreement. The existence of a Supreme Moral Governor, the truth of Revelation, the existence and office of the Mediator, the sanctifying influences of the Spirit, the resurrection of the Dead, and a state of Impartial Retribution, form these essentials. In what consists the need of a more ample confession of faith, than these articles imply? Cannot a man be honest as a Calvinist in his belief of predestination, the saints perseverance, the imputation of original sin, and of particular redemption, without insisting on an assent to these articles from all, who wish admittance to his communion? Cannot a man be upright as a Hopkinsian, in subscribing these or any other speculative articles, without obliging his fellow Christians to bend their conscience to his mode of thinking? Is infallibility attached to these systems? Do not such prescriptions close the gate of the church more narrow than is the gate of heaven? In the apostles' days an avowed and sincere faith in the Lord Jesus Christ gained a title to the enjoyment of all privileges. Do

not Christians in later times arrogate to themselves unauthorized power, by proposing their peculiar construction of Christian doctrines as the term of discipleship? "Why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? To his own Master he standeth or falleth!"

After hearing the confession of faith proposed by the Pastor, some of the church committee doubted its correspondence with the instructions of reason or scripture. On more maturely weighing and discussing the subject, their doubts increased. It appeared rather as a sketch of the Hopkinsian system than to exhibit the outlines of Christianity.* Viewing it as militating with the plan of the gospel, it excited much alarm. The church, fearing it would lay a foundation for altercation and division, waved for some time an ultimate decision. No intreaties or expostulations could dissuade the Pastor from urging the adoption of the new confession of faith and form of covenant. At length they were thus received. The church contained forty-four male members. Twentytwo of this number were present at the meeting. Twelve only voted in their favor. Thus by little more than a fourth part of the body was this interesting and solemn business transacted, which at the time threatened a lasting interruption

* The reader is referred to the Church's publication, which contains this Confession of Faith, for forming his judgment of it.

of the peace of the town, and of the order and comfort of the church.

Much is said in the Church's publication of the catholic and conciliatory plan, on which the new forms were introduced.* It was conceded, there was not an explicit demand of consent from those, who had subscribed the former covenant. Does it consist with the condescending ideas, which are expressed, that they should be adopted at the risque of every thing else, which was dear to them as men and as Christians ? Can it be reconciled with the idea of dispensing at any time with particular articles, that the Pastor should declare in presence of the mutual council, that " the members of the church considered these as forming the sheet anchor of their hopes, and that sooner than relinquish any part, they would sacrifice their minister and every earthly prospect ?" Facts proved, that the confession of faith must be preserved entire. A formal request was made by one person for admission to the church without subscribing particular articles. Insuperable objections arose, and the request was never complied with. The impression generally obtained, that a voluntary consent to the new forms was the only satisfactory evidence of a person's really possessing the Christian temper.

* Pages 7, 8.

If the plan on which these were *professedly* introduced have any implication, what other can it be than this, that certain articles were not essential doctrines of Christianity ? Can then wisdom, Christian candor, or zeal, which is according to godliness, be predicated of the unwearied efforts, and of the pertinacity displayed in their introduction ? Can the measure be advocated for its expediency or probable utility ?

The point has been controverted by some, whether the church by giving up its original covenant in the manner we have stated, and adopting a new one, became a new church ? It is also a question, whether the members, who dissented from the new forms, were still amenable to the body ?

The platform, adopted by a Synod assembled at Cambridge, in 1649, was acknowledged by Mr. WORCESTER and his adherents, to deserve high veneration. In that system of church government, the following sentiments occur : * “ Particular churches cannot be distinguished one from another but by their forms. This form is the visible covenant, agreement, or consent, whereby they give up themselves unto the Lord, to the observing of the ordinances of Christ together in the same society, which is usually called the church covenant, for we see not otherwise,

* Chap. 4. Art. 2, 3.

how members can have church power one over another mutually. The comparing of each particular church unto a city and unto a spouse, seemeth to conclude not only a form, but that that form is by way of covenant." The covenant is then the connecting bond of the members. So long as this is preserved, their relation and mutual obligations continue.

Churches have undoubtedly a right in a regular mode and with the concurrence of the members, to change their bond of union. All who join in the ratification of the bond newly received, are equally bound by it as by the former. But if any portion of a church, entertaining different speculative opinions from the rest, admitting such portion to form a majority, do, in defiance of the feelings, wishes, and views of their Christian brethren, adopt a new system to unite and regulate them, can the minority be still amenable to their direction and discipline? Certainly not. By their unchristian zeal they have separated from the brotherhood, with which they were connected. They have created a scism in the body. They have disjoined that, which can only by general agreement be separated. They have by an unchristian and disorderly act, annihilated the most sacred of all bonds.

The covenanting of Christians is somewhat similar to a partnership in business. If the number concerned be five, and three of them influenced by any motive, dissolve the origin-

al contract, and form a new one, have they still power over the remaining two? Can they oblige them to submit to their new regulations? Does not all their authority over them cease, at the moment the first covenant was dissolved?

Possibly the church covenant may be said more nearly to resemble a constitution of civil government. Will the whole circle of history present one, which has been newly modified or changed by the act of a fourth part of the subjects? Is there not in the construction of every good system provision made for protecting the rights of all the subjects, and for guarding them against being unreasonably or oppressively infringed? Is it not a fundamental principle in the federal system, that no change shall be made in the constitution but by the concurring voice of three fourths of the states in the union?

A principle is assumed by the church in their publication, which is altogether novel. Their determination is asserted, that the members, who will not subscribe the new forms, shall be governed and disciplined by the old covenant. Can any instance be named of any body, civil or ecclesiastical, who have at the same time two constitutions in existence, and who as convenience may dictate, shall enforce the principles of one or the other? Has any nation existed, who did at the same time avowedly adopt and maintain a republican

and monarchical system of government ? Perceiving the difficulty and *probable inconvenience* which would arise from an implicit acknowledgment of two covenants, in presence of the mutual council the idea was disclaimed.*

When the Rev. Mr. WORCESTER and his church changed their forms, the novelty and confusion of the scene surprised and confounded us. Unversed in ecclesiastical concerns, we frankly acknowledge, we were ignorant of our situation. On deliberation and serious inquiry, conviction was produced, that the few members, who had forsaken their original establishment, had literally formed themselves into a new church. Fully to impress them with our belief, and satisfied that the measures they had adopted, were unjust, oppressive, and antichristian, some of us forsook their association. The preaching of the Pastor discovered an illiberal and persecuting spirit. And the conduct of the brethren, so nearly corresponded with the violence and intolerance manifested in the adoption of the new confession of faith and form of covenant, that we could derive neither edification nor comfort, from attending Christian institutions with them.

In a season of religious controversy it is common for Christians, heated by enthusiasm,

* The reader is desired to revert to the statements of the church, and to say whether the idea of two covenants be not naturally inferred ?

to attach to their opposers epithets, imagined to be opprobrious, and to denounce them as patrons of some dangerous heresy. It is no want of candor to believe, that this sometimes has for its motive the arresting the popular attention, and the conciliating of general favor. We do not presume to assign the real cause, but we find it hard to reconcile with a love of truth, that the church should hazard the insinuation, that the opposers of Mr. WORCESTER were decided advocates of the universalian doctrine. Some few are believers in the final restoration of all men. This number is very inconsiderable. By far the greater proportion, who disapprove the unprecedented and novel arrangements of the church, have always viewed this doctrine as being without scriptural foundation.

When the human passions gain in any degree the ascendancy over reason, effects tending to destroy the order and interests of society and of the church will naturally follow. This town presents a most melancholy example. Believing their Christian rights invaded, the inhabitants in the moment of confusion, resorted to desperate measures, to relieve them from their embarrassments. We can plead no other apology for apportioning the meetinghouse to the different sects of Christians. In this also originated the "Fitchburg Universal Christian Society." The members were soon satisfied, that this was

an indiscrete and unconstitutional establishment. Erroneous representations are made concerning it. In the pamphlet, issued by the church, it is insinuated, that most of the persons signing the compact for this society, were Universalists. This is a gross mistatement. Nothing can be inferred from the title by any one, acquainted with the history of its origin, to justify the sentiment. It was well known, that to become associated with the Rev. Mr. WORCESTER'S church, a person must be an Hopkinsian. Admittance to its fellowship was the exclusive privilege of Christians of these speculative ideas. The newly formed society was established upon a more catholic plan. It was called *universal*, as it would patronize honest Christians of all persuasions. These ideas are not suggested, nor these explanations given with a design to obliterate the imprudence of the association. They are intended as palliating circumstances, and to prove, that it did not originate in hostility to social and religious order, but in a wish to discourage and check the usurpations of the church, and to rid ourselves of the maintenance of its minister.

The church present the reader with a history of some circumstances which led to the calling of a Council.*^a These contain the truth, but not the whole truth. In addition to what appears, it might, yea it ought to

have been stated, that a private interview was held between the Pastor and a committee appointed by the town for the purpose. The committee were then led to understand, that the design of the council was solely to ratify a dissolution of the pastoral relation between Mr. WORCESTER and his people, and that there was to be no trial of character.* An allusion to a single circumstance is sufficient to prove, that these ideas were entertained on both sides. In the terms, on which Mr. WORCESTER proposed that a mutual council should be called, is this article.† “If the town have any allegations to lay before the council against me, they shall fairly state them to me in writing at least *ten days* prior to the sitting of the council.” The subsequent transactions of the church evinced their persuasion, that this article was annihilated by the Pastor and the committee. On Friday afternoon of the twelfth day of June, the church voted to invite the council to assemble on Monday forenoon of the twentysecond day of the same month. Some hours were wanting of the term prescribed for bringing forward allegations. When the council assembled, contrary to this preliminary which the church had so fairly stated, the Pastor *attempted* a full disclosure of the transactions, the supposed disorders, and irregular conduct of the town. On this partial statement was

* Pages 13, 14. ———† Page 14.

the result grounded. Had it been supposed that such a measure was meditated, would the aggrieved party have submitted their case to a council, in the election of which they had no voice? Did it accord with Christian candor or ingenuousness, to take the supposed delinquents unawares, and to bring against them "railing accusations," without allowing any previous opportunity for arranging their defence? These circumstances may account to impartial readers for the indignation, expressed in the result of this council, against the opposers of Mr. WORCESTER, and for their decided and universal commendation of his ministerial conduct. "He that is first in his own cause, seemeth to be right, but his neighbor cometh, and searcheth him out."

Our attention is next arrested by a history of the censures, inflicted upon several of the members.* The result of a mutual council in reference to these persons will enable the public impartially to judge of the *wisdom*, *moderation*, and *lenity* of the church in their decisions.

Respecting three of the cases, as the doings of the church were marked with pointed severity, we think it expedient to make some few remarks. BLANEY PHILLIPS, was one of the persons, who protested against the ordination of the Rev. S. WORCESTER. When the scene of confusion and discord began to

* Page 22, &c.

open, living nearly equidistant from the meetinghouses in Fitchburg and Westminster, he frequently attended worship and the ordinances in the latter place. This was proved by the testimony of a Deacon of the church before the mutual council. Where was the criminality of this conduct? If it be so highly criminal as the church represent, how can they justify themselves in countenancing similar enormity in the members of other churches? During the greater part of Mr. WORCESTER'S ministry, two members from a neighboring church were admitted to associate with his church in all the institutions of religion. Was it right, was it Christian, to tolerate in others a practice, which exposed those, whom they viewed as their own members, to the sentence of excommunication?

The case of EDWARD DURANT appears to have summoned into action all the asperity of these vigilant Christians. He is charged with being an Universalist. This, as it relates to the final Restoration of all men, he acknowledges to be truth. He is summoned, after being visited by some of the members, to appear before the church. Disposed fairly and fully to investigate the grounds of the complaint brought against him, he requested a copy of the allegations, signed by the accuser. Did not this discover ingenuousness and conscious rectitude? He asked for a week to deliberate and prepare his defence. Was

this inconsistent with the solemnity of the business? Would any power short of *papal* have refused a compliance? He solicited, that the transaction might be public. Did this prove apprehensions of failure in vindicating his character, or an unwillingness to have his enemies exert their utmost to convict him?^b

A much more labored and artful explanation than has yet appeared, will be necessary to reconcile the church's procedure in this instance, with the dictates of reason or the gospel. The pretended reason for precipitancy is, that he was a heretic. In the platform we have this direction in allusion to the case of heresy in the Corinthian church. "But if the offence be more public at first, and of a more heinous and criminal nature, to wit, such as are condemned by the light of nature, then the church, without such gradual proceeding is to cast out the offender from their holy communion, for the further mortifying of his sin and the healing of his soul in the day of the Lord Jesus."* Is a belief in the final restoration of all men this offence? Did ORIGEN, CHAUNCY, and other worthies, whose names have adorned the annals of the church, deserve for this supposed speculative error the sentence of excommunication?—Which is the greater contradiction to the light of nature, the doctrine of absolute and

* Chap. 14. Sec. 3.

unconditional Election, or the doctrine of Universal Salvation? Which militates most with all natural ideas of the rectitude and goodness of the Divine Character, the belief that his mercy will be finally displayed in the salvation of all men, or the doctrine, that God is the efficient cause of moral evil? Must not the members of an individual church attain to infallibility, before they presume to arraign and to anathematize their fellow Christians for speculative opinions?

Admitting that this man had been an heretic, did not the church in their solicitude to exterminate an enemy to their oppressive measures, set at defiance the Christian rule in such a case? "An heretic after the first and second admonition reject." Their construction of this rule, which is rather singular, is this.* "The means used to convince him in the private steps, we suppose to be the first admonition; and those used by the church, when the case is brought before them, the second." Having in their hands all power, they proceeded immediately on his appearing before them, without waiting to administer a second admonition, to pass sentence of excommunication.

The following extract from the letter, sent to EDWARD DURANT, may serve for a specimen of the *clemency* of the church, and the ardor of their *concern* for an offending broth-

* Page 29 of "Facts and Documents," &c.

er. "It is not without the deepest and most painful concern, that we observe in you such striking and evident marks of hardened impenitence, and of a heart *totally* opposed to religion, and *fully* set to do evil, under your present unhappy circumstances." Notwithstanding this highly wrought passage, the Pastor, in presence of the mutual council acknowledged, that "in the performance of the relative duties, as those of husband, parent, master, and citizen, he believed this man to be exemplary and conscientious." Is it not rare to discover these important qualities in a character, who is so vile, malignant, and disorganizing as a Christian?

We feel constrained to pay a tribute to the memory of our deceased brother, PHINEHAS HARTWELL. No reader, who was acquainted with him, will think a vindication of his character necessary. When these troublous times in Fitchburg commenced, he had nearly reached the common age of man. His character had been irreproachable. He had formed an enlarged acquaintance with religion, and been a pattern of enlightened and fervent piety. Rational and catholic in his views of the gospel, he decidedly opposed the new forms, because they did not exhibit in his opinion the religion of his Master, and were calculated to produce a long scene of dissention and unhappiness. Considering the spirit, which promoted this change in the

church, and most of its disciplinary measures as nearly resembling the descriptions of popish tyranny, he independently declared this. Because from principle and from understanding he was prevented from bowing to the yoke, this eminent saint was suspended from the enjoyment of Christian privileges. How has a furious and misguided zeal led to excesses and dominations, which have imprinted an indelible stain on the page of ecclesiastical history ! It has in this instance brought down the gray hairs of this pious and humble Christian with sorrow to the grave.*

The other censures of the church, being fully commented on in the result of the mutual council, the reader is referred to that for assistance in forming an impartial opinion.

The persons suffering the sentence of suspension and excommunication, conceived themselves hardly and injuriously treated. In the view of men, ignorant of the origin and progress of the unhappy divisions in this place, we were beheld as openly hostile to the interests of virtue and piety, and wilful disturbers of the peace of the church. Desirous that our characters should be weighed in an even balance, we made a formal, and as we intended a respectful application to the church, to join us in calling a mutual council.

* It is worthy of particular remark, that two of the Deacons of the church, which had suspended PHINEHAS HARTWELL from their communion, gave ample testimony of his uniform and exemplary piety. He died March 1803, *Ætatis* 71.

This application, with the reply made to it, may be seen in the statement of the church.* It being in our view not inconsistent with the rules of the gospel, that excommunicants should have a voice in the election of a council, before whom their case may be fairly investigated, we endeavored with Christian submission to ask this privilege. In answer the church say, "but as we know of no rule in the gospel, no provision in the platform, no precedent in the usage of the churches, which will authorize or warrant a church to join with excommunicated persons in calling a council, we think there would be an impropriety in granting your request on its present basis."

Hearing it often suggested that the *Christian rule*, that *platform*, that *custom*, and that *reason* denied this equitable indulgence to excommunicants, we have attempted without prejudice, to ground our judgment on these authorities.—As the highest and only infallible source of evidence, we appeal "to the law and to the testimony." Can any thing be naturally inferred from the prescriptions of the Christian Lawgiver, which abrogates this right? In the eighteenth chapter of Matthew are contained the principal if not the only regulations he gave relating to the discipline of the church. These are far from subverting the principle we feel interested to support. An individual, who cannot by taking the pre-

* Pages 34, 35.

vious steps, reclaim an offender, is directed “to tell it to the church.” Who form the Church? Undoubtedly at the time this rule was established, it meant the body of believers. The brotherhood were not then parcelled out into particular churches, bounded by certain limits. In the application of the rule to after ages, it might primarily refer to that particular church, with which the offending brother was immediately connected. Is there any contradiction in supposing, that our Savior designedly left this instruction without any limitation, that the case might be told to as many Christians, and in the manner which should seem most expedient to as many branches of the church, as should be necessary to a thorough understanding of it, and to an equitable decision?

If it be true, as the church intimate, that nothing of importance to the order and peace of the churches is left to the discretion and construction of Christians, let them point out the rule for joining with suspended persons, or with any others in calling a council. Our Savior was a preacher of righteousness.—When justice could not be done his professed followers before one tribunal, he left them at liberty to appeal to another.

The platform is of human invention. From its antiquity and the wisdom of its formation it is deservedly held in high estimation as containing one of the best systems for the

government of the churches. We are supported by a belief, that nothing here appears, which debars us from this privilege. In no part is it suggested, that the decisions of the church are final. Neither is the independency of the churches so far presumed, as that it is irregular to join with excommunicants, in soliciting the advice of sister churches, relating to the cases, which have been under their consideration. An instance is named in the platform, which we think may be considered as deciding the question.* “If a church be rent with divisions amongst themselves, and yet refuse to consult with other churches, for healing or removing of the same, it is matter of just offence both to the Lord Jesus and to other churches, as bewraying too much want of mercy and faithfulness.”

This was a church “rent with divisions.” The origin was the introduction of the new forms. This measure issued in the unreasonable censure of the members. Finding there was no probability of relief from the church, which had denounced them, they wished the case to be submitted to an impartial council. Where was the irregularity of this wish? Where is the inconsistency of asserting this as a right? Was it not the most likely method of healing the divisions? A single passage does not occur in the scriptures, or in the platform, which can be strain-

* Chap. 15. Sec. 2.

ed into a denial of this indulgence. If nothing expressly or implicitly in them prohibit this measure, where is the *licentiousness* of supposing, that in the regulation and discipline of the church much is left to human prudence and construction ?

We can find no respectable examples, to invalidate the consistency of this right. And it is worthy of particular remark, that in the writings of all the Christian fathers on church government, the connexion and amenableness of the churches are principles they have maintained.

Reason is assuredly a powerful advocate for the right which is contested. If a man be accused of violation of civil rule he has the privilege of a trial, before impartial judges and an unprejudiced jury. If charged with delinquency as a Christian, is not the privilege more highly important and reasonable ?

There is difficulty in framing any apology for the disciplinary modes of this church. To suspended persons they allow the liberty of choosing part of a council. From excommunicants they withhold it. Is it not of as much consequence to a person, who is accused of high crimes, to have his cause wisely and equitably tried, as to a person, who has committed only some trifling fault ?

It may be suggested, that churches, with which excommunicants are connected, are more likely to be apprized of circumstances,

to understand characters, and to form an enlightened and impartial judgment, than other Christians. Contemplate a church, which has adopted a new constitution, and taken the steps, which are developed by the past history of the proceedings of Mr. WORCESTER'S church, and judge, whether local and party views had probably no influence in the censures which they inflicted. View us oppressed and persecuted, debarred from all church privileges, stigmatized as the foes of social and religious order. Remember, that the sentence of excommunication was passed by those who had, contrary to ecclesiastical rule, changed their form of covenant. Forget not, that this originated and continued the scene of difficulties and contention, with which this unhappy town has struggled.— Having taken this view of the subject, say, whether it can be called assuming, arrogant, or disorderly to solicit, and to insist on an appeal from the decision of those who have discarded us, to that of an impartial mutual council? Christianity is too consistent, and its Author was too wise and just, not to tolerate his professed followers in the assertion and defence of their natural rights.

One argument insisted on by those, who deny the right of excommunicants to a council, is that *that they are out of the church*, that *they are of the world*, and that while in this predicament they have no title to Chris-

tian privileges. "Let him be to thee as a heathen man and a publican." Admitting the common interpretation of this phrase the true one, is it supposable, that the Savior vested with this authority a church, which had by its own arbitrary and oppressive acts, been in great measure the occasion of the offences, for which this heavy censure is inflicted? "First cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

Finding that there was no probability of an acknowledgment of the rights of excommunicants, we impartially reported their afflictions to the churches in this vicinity. We showed them a communication made to us by the church, containing their principles, and from which, they gave positive assurance, that they should not recede. Considering our situation pitiable, they listened to our request, and by their Elders and Messengers came over to help and to counsel us.

When convened, after a long and unsuccessful interview with the church committee, and mature deliberation in private, the council by a message proposed this question.—This and the reply are introduced for the purpose of reconciling an apparent inconsistency in the doings of the council, and of showing, that the church did not in the least depart from their favorite principle.

“ The ecclesiastical council now convened in Fitchburg, of which the Rev. FRANCIS GARDNER is Moderator, wish to know, Whether it is consistent with your ideas, that any member not excommunicated, shall be allowed to choose one half of a mutual council; to judge and advise upon the proceedings of the church, against several of their members, and all matters of difficulty existing, from a nomination list prepared by those, who have been excommunicated, with whose excommunication he professes himself to be aggrieved, and that the whole of this arrangement be made known in the letters missive ?”

From the records of the council.

NATHANIEL THAYER, *Scribe.*

To the Rev. S. WORCESTER,

September 15, 1801.

The council designed by this message to treat the church with delicacy. They did not ask for a renunciation of their principle, that it was improper to join with excommunicants in calling a council. Neither were they willing on their part to abandon the idea, that this was proper and truly Christian. Wishing to conciliate, they proposed the above accommodating plan. They supposed, that making known the whole arrangements in the letters missive, would leave to each their particular sentiments, and would per-

fectly consist with uprightness and real independence.

How was this conciliatory proposal met ? The answer proves.

“ As a committee we are not at liberty to recede from the ground, which this church has taken respecting excommunicants. The votes of the church upon this subject are *explicit* and *decisive*. We have already manifested our willingness to join with any individual member of this church, who will present a regular request for the purpose in calling a mutual council ; and that any and all of the proceedings of this church, which he considers as matters of grievance to him, not excepting those respecting the excommunicated persons should be brought to a fair and full hearing before the council thus called. For all this we are still willing. If a mutual council be called, we expect, that one of the churches, of which it may consist, will be mutually agreed upon by the parties ; one half of the rest will be chosen by us, and the other half the other party will be at liberty to choose. If the other party be willing to confine himself in his choice to a nomination list, prepared by the excommunicants, we will not object to it. It will doubtless be understood, that if a council be agreed upon, we shall expect a fair statement in writing from the other party, of all his grievances or allegations so early as to give us sufficient opportunity to

prepare for our defence. As to the letters missive, we are willing they should go out in the usual form, and make known any arrangement between the parties, so far as is usual, when mutual councils are called.

SAMUEL WORCESTER,	} Committee of the Church.
DANIEL PUTNAM,	
KENDALL BOUTELL,	
MOSES HALE,	
JOHN FARWELL,	

Rev. FRANCIS GARDNER, *Moderator of the ex parte council.*

Fitchburg, September 15, 1801.

In "Facts and Documents" the reader is thus addressed.* "We beg that these communications between the council and the committee of the church may be carefully and candidly compared. In what *material point* did the answer of the committee fail of meeting the proposal of the council in their first message?" We answer, that it failed in every material point. There was no semblance of accommodation, nor the most faint symptom of condescension. Excommunicants were to enjoy no privilege independently. They were to lie entirely at the mercy of the aggrieved member. If when the council was called, he should be disposed to bring forward their case as *his* grievance, it might have a hearing. The church also say, that

the letters may go out in the "usual form." The council wished for a particular form, because this was a particular case, and because when treating with Christians, "who watch for our halting," there is need of peculiar vigilance.

The tenacity of the church in this instance was the sole cause, why a mutual council was so long delayed. And the appearance of accommodation in the letter missive, which was last adopted, was the only circumstance, which influenced the council, called by the aggrieved, to close with the proposals of the church.

A copy of this letter follows as evidence, that the right of excommunicants was contemplated in the calling of the mutual council.

"To the church of Christ in ——— the church of Christ in Fitchburg sendeth greeting.

"Rev. and Beloved,

"As serious and unhappy differences have long existed in this church, and all endeavors to effect a reconciliation have hitherto proved unsuccessful, we unitedly and earnestly request your presence and assistance in council by your Rev. Pastor and Delegate, to take into consideration the proceedings of this church, relative to the introduction of articles of faith, and the revisal of our form of admission to the church, and the censures of suspension and excommunication, which have

been passed upon several of our members, *and of which they complain as grievances*, together with any other articles or questions, which by mutual agreement may be laid before you."

A true copy from the original as draughted by Mr. WORCESTER.

The candid reader is appealed to, to decide whether suspended and excommunicated persons are not in this letter represented as on equal ground, and whether *their mutual complaint* is not assigned as one cause of the council being called. Is not the complexion of this whole letter such, as that every person of common understanding will perceive an implicit acknowledgment of the right of excommunicants to appeal from the sentence of a particular church to a higher and equitable tribunal?

The pamphlet contains very liberal censures on the churches forming the ex parte council.* The compliance with such invitations, as they received, is described as a disorderly interference in the interior discipline of a church. They are condemned for not adhering to the principles of the platform, and if they were dissatisfied, for not admonishing that church, agreeably to what is called the third way of communion. Since the platform was known, but few instances have occurred, in which this method was practis-

* Page 59, &c.

ed. We have been able to learn the accurate history of but one. In 1733 a controversy arose in the church in Salem, of which the Rev. SAMUEL FISK was Pastor. It arrested the attention of neighboring societies. This mode of admonition was pursued. In the course of the dispute many churches were entangled. It neither terminated in the restoration of peace nor in advancing the common interest of the church.

In the course of that year the Rev. BENJAMIN COLMAN, D. D. of Boston, who was an ornament to the church, and held in high veneration for his theological and Christian attainments, penned his thoughts on this subject. Having been consulted during the contention in Salem, it is supposed the remarks were suggested by that case. "Although our Fathers in the Synod of ——— proposed it, yet they did not see cause afterwards to practice upon it, not for want of occasion and opportunity, or from inconsideration of the matter and unfaithfulness, but in point of prudence. They were as wise and faithful as we are now, but they threw it by as not so proper a method, or at least fearing the event of it, and it may be scrupling it from the nature of the thing. By so long a disuse even from the beginning, like a law or rule made and never put in practice, it is grown obsolete, and become as a thing dead and buried, and not to be revived and put in force at the

will of a private person, nor on a particular occasion here and there.”*

We have proceeded in our remarks on the idea, that excommunication as held by Rev. Mr. WORCESTER and his church was a censure, warranted by scripture. On this ground we think we have proved, that the transactions of that church were unreasonably severe, and that the principles they held, are neither founded in scripture nor platform. It is questioned by some great and good men, whether the power of excommunication as exercised by them was vested by the Christian lawgiver in his followers after the apostolic age, or whether suspension from the present enjoyment of Christian privileges be not the highest censure, which can be inflicted ?

We have extracted from the publication of a respected father in the church, the following ideas on this subject. “ As to a power, fastened to the keys of the kingdom of heaven, a power of binding and loosing, by which men can excommunicate and deliver up a person to the devil in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, we pretend to no such power. We know that excommunication was an act of apostolical authority ; but we can see no reason, why delivering up to satan to be buffeted should be made the common form of excommunication,

* Vid. Turell's life of Colman, page 103.

and become a precedent for the constant practice of the church.

“ That this was an act of miraculous power, visibly lodged with the apostles, is plain to us ; because as they could strike men blind and dead, they had the power also of letting evil spirits loose, to terrify, plague, and punish such persons, as were enemies of truth and righteousness, that so a terrible remedy might be inflicted for a dreadful evil. We do not therefore wonder, that the apostles never mention this among the standing appointments for the church to observe, nor give any charge or directions about it. And it appears very strange unto us, that this method of denouncing anathemas has obtained so much in churches, and even among such churches as pretend to elevated degrees of reformation ; believing that the absurd notion of the infallibility of the church has been carried on by it, and that it has laid the foundation for endless animosities and the greatest uncharitableness.”*

Let the Rev. Mr. WORCESTER and the church contemplate these ideas. Let them also review the precipitancy and positiveness with which they presumed to anathematize their fellow Christians, and judge, how far the authority they exercised, is derived from scripture warrant.

* Mather's apology for the liberties of the churches in Newengland, page 106.

After long and unwearied exertions of the ex parte councils, the church were prevailed with to consent to a mutual council on equal and regular ground. In the election of this council, it deserves particular notice, that the odd church was named by an agent, appointed by Mr. WORCESTER and his church committee for the purpose. The proposal was only consented to by the agents for the aggrieved. In this way the church had the advantage of choosing a majority of the mutual council.

When this council assembled, it was supposed by the aggrieved, that the preliminaries were fully settled. The excommunicants expected entire liberty to conduct their defence, as appeared most expedient. In addition to the letter missive, they supposed licence was given them by the following communication from the church, to appear before the council in their own defence. "If there be any in the church, as it is intimated there are, who are dissatisfied with the proceedings of the church, respecting you, as well as respecting themselves, they can bring the whole matter before a council; and when it is brought forward, you will doubtless be admitted by the council, *to speak for yourselves.*"* Can any one imagine, that the church, having thus pledged themselves, would have contest-

* Page 36 of "Facts and Documents."

ed the right of excommunicants, to defend their own cause? Even this glaring contradiction appeared. In the name of the church Mr. WORCESTER strove to have them debarred the privilege. From the result of the council a view of the controversy on this point will appear. Agreeably to the suggestions and probably influenced by the wishes of the church, a member of the council, whom they had elected, threatened to separate from the body, if excommunicants were allowed *to speak for themselves*. When appearing, a minority of the council viewed them, not as speaking for themselves, but for the member of the church, who was aggrieved by the treatment they had received. Is this the liberty allowed by Christianity, or does it resemble the edicts and the arrogant requisitions of papal tyranny? We speak as to wise men, judge ye of the *candor*, *condescension*, and *consistency* of this church.

When the council had settled the terms, on which excommunicants should be heard, desirous of terminating the dispute and of showing the condescension, required of us in the gospel, we publicly made this offer of accommodation.

“The aggrieved brethren of the church in Fitchburg, wish through the medium of the venerable council now convened in this place, to make the following communication to the

Rev. Mr. WORCESTER and the members of his church :

“ Fellow Christians,

“ We feel deeply affected by the present unhappy and divided state of this Christian society. We wish publicly to demonstrate to you and to the world our serious and anxious concern for the restoration of peace. We are led to the present measure not by a dread of an impartial and thorough investigation of our conduct, but by a full conviction, that this will be the most likely method to accomplish the object we all professedly pursue.

On our part we are ready to acknowledge, that imprudencies and errors have escaped us in the course of our difficulties. We have no pretensions to infallibility. We particularly concede, that the forming of what was called the “ Universal Christian Society,” was an erroneous step, and was taken in consequence of our being unacquainted with the nature of ecclesiastical concerns. For this error we think we could exhibit some important palliations.. We also acknowledge that the offering of a child for baptism at the west meetinghouse, by one of our number, is contrary to the rules of the gospel.

“ On the part of the Rev. Mr. WORCESTER’S church, we wish no farther concessions or condescension, than that they should meet us, on whom they have passed lighter or more severe censures on the ground of the confes-

sion of faith and form of covenant, formerly known in the church. On condition this, which is our ardent desire shall be complied with, we propose, that all allegations and questions to be submitted by the respective parties to the present council be dispensed with, that the Rev. Mr. WORCESTER be dismissed from his pastoral relation, and we unitedly enter on the enjoyment of Christian privileges as a band of brothers.

With an anxious hope, that our proposals will meet the approbation and ready compliance of the Rev. Mr. WORCESTER and his adherents, we subscribe ourselves their brethren in the faith of the gospel.

Signed by a committee of the aggrieved brethren of the church.

To the Rev. Moderator of the mutual council now in session, with a request that it may be communicated.

Fitchburg, August 31, 1802.

The communication was made. The Pastor, as if he had entire authority over the sentiments and decisions of his church, without any previous deliberation or consultation assured the council, that the offer was inadmissible.

The council having patiently and candidly listened to the various subjects of discussion, published their result.

An ecclesiastical council convened at the house of Capt. WILLIAM BROWN, in Fitchburg, August 31, 1802, by letters missive from the church in said place, and continued by adjournments to September 8, for purposes expressed in said letter, which is as follows, viz. "As serious and unhappy differences have long existed in this church, and all endeavors for a reconciliation have hitherto proved unsuccessful, we unitedly and earnestly request your presence and assistance, in council, by your Rev. Pastor and Delegate, to take into consideration the proceedings of this church, and the censures of suspension and excommunication which have been passed upon several of our members, and of which they complain as grievances; together with any other articles or questions, which by mutual agreement may come before you."

Present the following Churches by their Pastors and Delegates.

Shrewsbury, Rev. Joseph Sumner, Deacon John Bragg; *Dunstable*, Rev. Joseph Kidder, Deacon Benjamin Smith; *Abington*, Rev. Samuel Niles, Mr. Eleazer Whitman; *Acton*, Rev. Moses Adams, Deacon Simon Hunt; 2d Church in *Worcester*, Rev. Aaron Bancroft, Mr. David Andrews; *Randolph*, Rev. Jonathan Strong, Maj. Barnabas Clark; *Dunbarton*, Rev. Walter Harris, Deacon Samuel Burnham.

The council chose the Rev. Mr. SUMNER Moderator, and the Rev. AARON BANCROFT and the Rev. JONATHAN STRONG, Scribes.

The Moderator addressed the throne of grace for wisdom in the business before the Council.

A committee of the church and the agent of the agrieved appeared and mutually made their statements of the measures agreed upon preparatory to the session of council.

It immediately became a question in what character the excommunicants were to appear before the council; the church refused to meet them as a party in the controversy; and the excommunicants claimed all the rights of a party.

Whereupon the following vote passed unanimously. The council having considered the statements made by the committee of the church and the agent of the excommunicated, find that there is a disagreement in the terms on which questions of censure are to be submitted, we think it expedient to hear the cases of the aggrieved agreeably to the form of the letter missive; and according to the letter missive it appears to us, that the case of the excommunicated should be fairly and fully represented by such agent as they together with the aggrieved members of the church shall appoint.

Adjourned to the Meetinghouse.

The Rev. Mr. WORCESTER in the name of the church presented the following paper.

Questions and Cases to be submitted to the Mutual Council, August 31, 1802.

1st. The aggrieved brethren of the church having joined in calling a mutual council, in consequence of a promise they have received from a committee of the church, that Mr. WORCESTER shall be dismissed by said council; ought not Mr. WORCESTER's dismissal from his pastoral relation to take place, as the first business before the council?

2d. Did not the introduction of the new confession of faith and form of covenant, under existing circumstances, amount to the formation of a new church? Or, in case a new confession of faith and form of covenant are thus introduced, are the members in the minority amenable to the majority?

3d. Considering the inflexible purpose of Mr. WORCESTER to adopt the new forms, even at the risque of the union of the town, and of his continuance as their minister, had not the opposers good reason to suppose, that the new confession would be an indispensable term in the admission of members; notwithstanding the professions which were made to the contrary?

4th. On supposition the church under the Rev. Mr. WORCESTER's care, were authorised to discipline the minority, were not the censures of suspension and excommunication

unreasonably severe and of course ought they not to be annulled ?

The following are the cases in their order.

- 1st. *Mr. Jacob Burnap*, excommunicated.
- 2d. *Mr. Blany Phillips*, excommunicated.
- 3d. *Mr. Edward Durant*, excommunicated.
- 4th. *Mr. William Brown*, excommunicated.
- 5th. *Mr. Jonathan Wood*, excommunicated.
- 6th. *Brother Phineas Hartwell*, suspended.
- 7th. *Brother William Kendall*, suspended.

Ques. 5th. Have not the Rev. Mr. WORCESTER and his church wanted uniformity and openness in their proposals for the election of a mutual council ; thus leading their opposers to doubt of the expediency and safety of a compliance, and retarding the settlement of the disputes which have arisen ?

6th. Are the persons who have been excommunicated from this church, in their present state, on regular communional ground ?

7th. Is it right for individual members of a church to unite with excommunicants in calling a council ? If it be in any case, are there not previous steps to be taken with the church ?

8th. Is it not expedient that the confession of faith and form of covenant, formerly used in the church should be renewed ?

Under Article 1st. Voted. That the dismission of the Rev. Mr. WORCESTER immediately precede the publication of our result.

The Rev. Mr. WORCESTER appeared in behalf of the church, and the Rev. Mr. THAYER as agent for the aggrieved and excommunicated.

The council having patiently attended to the statements, testimonies, and pleas of the parties, and seriously deliberated upon their weight and importance, passed the following votes.

Article 2d. Upon the first question of the second Article, Voted unanimously—It does not appear to this council that there is or has been more than one church in Fitchburg.^c

Upon the second question of the second Article, Voted—The new forms, in the manner in which they were introduced, cannot in our view be considered as binding upon those who never consented to them.

Article 3d. Voted unanimously—This council entertain no doubt that the Rev. Mr. WORCESTER and the church were conscientious and sincere in the introduction of the new forms, and that they were willing to receive any into their communion who evidenced to them the Christian temper, notwithstanding they might not perfectly harmonize with them in every speculative point; yet considering the division which the new forms have been instrumental in some measure of occasioning, it might have been wiser to have adhered to the old form.

Article 4th. Voted—Although it is decidedly the opinion of the council that the persons censured and excommunicated were not amenable to the church in any case, yet at the mutual desire of the parties, we are willing to express our opinion upon their cases respectively.

The Yeas and Nays were called for upon this vote and were as follows :

YEAS.

Rev. JOSEPH SUMNER,
Rev. JOSEPH KIDDER,
Rev. MOSES ADAMS,
Rev. AARON BANCROFT,
Dea. SIMON HUNT,
Dea. BENJAMIN SMITH,
Dea. JOHN BRAGG,
Mr. DAVID ANDREWS.

NAYS.

Rev. SAMUEL NILES,
Rev. JONATHAN STRONG,
Rev. WALTER HARRIS,
Dea. SAMUEL BURNHAM,
Maj. BARNABAS CLARK,
Mr. ELEAZER WHITMAN.

Respecting the cases of Mr. *Jacob Burnap*, Mr. *Blany Phillips*, Mr. *Edward Durant*, Mr. *William Brown*, and Mr. *Jonathan Wood*, Voted—The conduct, for which the several processes in the church commenced, was not, in the opinion of this council, deserving of excommunication from the church of Christ. Eight and six.

Respecting the cases of Brother *Phineas Hartwell*, and Brother *William Kendall*, Voted—The conduct for which the several processes in the church commenced, was not, in the opinion of this council, deserving of suspension from the church of Christ.

This vote passed not on general principles, but in particular relation to the circumstances of the suspended members.

Article 5th. Voted unanimously—The Rev. Mr. WORCESTER and the church have been uniform in their proposals for a mutual council.^d

Article 6th. Voted—That the persons who have been excommunicated from this church are on regular communional ground.

The opinion of the council on this Article is founded on the result of the ex parte council, in September, 1801, in which they recommended the excommunicants to the fellowship of the churches, till the decision of a mutual council be obtained.

Article 7th. Question 1st. Voted—In the opinion of this council it is right for individual members of a church to unite with excommunicants in calling a council.

Question 2d. Voted unanimously—That previous steps ought to be taken with the church.

Article 8th. Voted unanimously—It is not expedient that the confession of faith and form of covenant formerly used in the church should be renewed.

But considering the unhappy divisions and controversies which have heavily afflicted this church, we judge it expedient that you should renew your covenant engagements with God. Although we presume not authoritatively to intermeddle with your internal regulations, yet in the spirit of Christian love and fellowship, we advise you to renew these engage-

ments under the covenant, which we shall submit to your serious perusal : And we are strengthened in the hope that you will comply with this advice, from the consideration, that you never made an assent to your present forms an indispensable term of admission into your body ; and that this council have unanimously expressed their opinion, that it might have been wiser not to have introduced them. Should you think it best to adopt the covenant now recommended, we conceive it proper that every individual member put his signature to it.

In our opinion the practices of the individual persons aggrieved have been attended with different degrees of error and fault : We shall give our views of their cases separately, and state the concessions, which we think it reasonable and proper they should make in order to be restored to the exercise of Christian privileges in this church.

It appears to us that the charges exhibited against Capt. JACOB BURNAP, of neglect of public worship and ordinances, presenting his child for baptism at the west meetinghouse, and of uttering at sundry times certain profane expressions, were substantiated ; for all which it is our opinion, he ought to humble himself before God, and his fellow Christians.

In the case of Mr. BLANY PHILLIPS, it appears to this council that he never did receive the Rev. SAMUEL WORCESTER for his

minister, but protested against his ordination, and frequently attended public worship at Westminster, and occasionally communed there, before he was excommunicated by this church—that allowing for common human infirmities, we do not find him blameworthy.

Capt. EDWARD DURANT acknowledges himself a believer in the final restoration of all men; and we are of opinion that every man may exercise the right of private judgment, without offence to a brother, provided he appear to be conscientious and conduct in a Christian manner. It appears he has been much engaged for the interest of religion, and for the peace and order of society; and whatever of a contrary tendency has been represented may charitably be imputed to a deep impression on his mind that he has been oppressed by the proceedings of the church.

Capt. WILLIAM BROWN acknowledges that he has lived in the neglect of family prayer, and too generally of public worship and ordinances; of which neglects the council entirely disapprove; and recommend it to him seriously to review his conduct, and the principle upon which he supports it; and to humble himself before God, and on conviction of his error to acknowledge it to his fellow Christians.

From the evidence adduced for and against Mr. JONATHAN WOOD, it appears, that he has imbibed universalian tenets, and been de-

sirous to propagate them ; but that he has been conscientious in so doing, and used no means which reason and religion will not justify. It is proved that he had been attentive to devotional exercises in public and private before the present unhappy controversy in this place. We therefore think him entitled to candor and charity.

It appears to this council, from unquestionable authority, that Mr. PHINEAS HARTWELL sustained a very amiable and pious character before the present troubles ; whatever has appeared in him since, in temper, language or conduct, indicative of a different character, we think, ought to be ascribed to supposed usurpation and oppression in the church, and to the great infirmities of old age.

It appears that Mr. WILLIAM KENDALL joined a society of professed Universalists in the west part of the town, which the council consider an irregular step in him, and all others who desire to be considered as members of the congregational church, and recommend to him and any other of the aggrieved in his predicament to renounce connexion with that society, and upon evidence of such renunciation and acknowledgment, advise the church to admit them to a participation of the ordinances of the gospel.

We lament that instances of unsuitable temper have occurred in one and another of the aggrieved persons, but it is conceived

they may all be imputed to that imperfection from which good men are not exempt, especially in a time of interesting controversy, and from which it does not appear that all in the church have on every occasion been free.—May that charity be exercised by all which covers a multitude of faults.

Respecting the compact called the Universal Christian Society in Fitchburg, we decidedly say that we think it an imprudent association and of bad tendency ; yet as they who composed it apprehended the Rev. Mr. WORCESTER and his church were adopting and pursuing ecclesiastical measures which tended to abridge them of their Christian liberty ; as they never contemplated a permanent society ; as a very small part of them were Universalists in principle ; as they considered it only as an expedient to exonerate themselves from the Rev. Mr. WORCESTER's support ; as they soon dissolved the compact and publicly confessed their error in its adoption—We advise that the whole affair be buried in oblivion.

The council do not believe in the doctrine of universal salvation, and will not advocate it : At the same time we do not consider its belief a sufficient ground of church censure or bar to admission into a Christian church.

In this opinion, we think we accord with the sentiment contained in a passage of a late publication of this church, viz. “ We are

fully in the belief, that had even the Universalists in this church, walked with us, in any good measure decently and orderly, we should never have inflicted any censure upon them, on account of their sentiments.”

To prevent all controversy on the question, Has the result of this mutual council been accepted? We judge, when the censured persons, or any of them, shall hand to the church a certificate in the words following—We the undersigned do by this certificate express to the church our approbation and acceptance of the result of the late mutual council; and do sincerely hereby make the acknowledgments required of us individually in that result; that such certificate will be an acceptance on the part of each and all of them, and ought to be received by the church as satisfactory: And we recommend to the church on these terms to receive the aggrieved as members and to admit them to the exercise of all Christian privileges.

Should the church on their part, refuse to receive the aggrieved as members, upon the condition above recommended, they are to be considered as standing on the regular communion ground, on which they stood before the calling of this council.

Brethren of this church, solemnly impressed with a sense of the duty you have imposed upon us, we have with patience and we trust impartiality attended to it. We sincerely la-

ment the unhappy divisions and contentions which have long subsisted among you. We deeply sympathize with you under your sufferings. In the spirit of the gospel, we exhort you carefully and seriously to review your past proceedings, that you may judge whether in some instances they have not been attended with a degree of severity that has contributed to the evils under which you now labor, and to a separation between you and the pastor whom you greatly esteemed and loved. We earnestly exhort you brethren to humble yourselves before God for every deviation from the gospel, and diligently to seek the things which make for peace and wherewith one may edify another. To this end, we desire you to take this result into calm, candid, and serious consideration. Ask of God direction and assistance. Be perfect. Be of one mind. Live in peace, and may the God of peace and love be with and bless you.

The pastoral relation between the Rev. Mr. WORCESTER and the church of Fitchburg was dissolved in presence of council.

Voted to accept the presented form of covenant.

Voted that the above be accepted as the result of council. Eight to six.

JOSEPH SUMNER, *Moderator.*

Attest,

AARON BANCROFT, }
JONATHAN STRONG, } *Scribes.*

Fitchburg, September 8, 1802..

In council, at the house of Capt. WILLIAM BROWN, Voted—That the Rev. AARON BANCROFT, Scribe, be empowered to correct a mistake in the case of Mr. WILLIAM KENDALL, and to record the correction as a part of the above result.

It now appears, that Mr. WILLIAM KENDALL did not join the Universalian Society in the west part of the town, as there stated, but signed the compact; the observations and requirements respecting a person in that predicament, will not therefore apply to him.

Attest, AARON BANCROFT, *Scribe.*

[*For the PROTEST against the above Result, see Notes.*]

After a suitable time the several aggrieved persons, by subscribing the proposed certificate, made the concessions required of them. The church, although repeatedly solicited, delayed a decision. The first transaction made known, was that they had accepted of the result so far as it was unanimous. Finally the remainder was rejected. In this manner was the hope of returning union, inspired by the circumstance, that a majority of the council were members of their own election, dissipated.

Will any pretend to plead, that this church have acted a consistent or a Christian part? Where is the ultimate decision of ecclesiastical controversy? Does it not rest in the result of a mutual council? Is any higher tribunal known in the churches? The candid and impartial are requested seriously to con-

sider, whether taking all circumstances into view, this church have not by their rejection of that result forfeited their Christian standing ? They have by this measure set at defiance the decision and judgment of a court of their own appointment. They have by this act virtually dissolved their connexion with their sister churches, and assumed to themselves complete and absolute independency..

It were to be wished, that the scene of their irregularity had here closed. The dissolution of Mr. WORCESTER's pastoral relation to this church and society was an indispensable article in the agreement for a mutual council. Soon after his dismissal, and while the result was, *as they pretended*, under consideration, the church invited him to a resettlement. As if *he* was uncertain whether this amounted to a violation of the pledge, which was solemnly given, he for several months kept them in suspense respecting his answer. Is this to be reconciled with good faith ? Is it evidence of solicitude for the order, peace and respectability of the church ?^e

We regularly informed the churches in the neighborhood of the transactions, relating to the result of the mutual council, and asked farther assistance and advice. They perceived that there was no prospect of an union on the ground there proposed, or on any other ground, consistent with the maintenance of Christian liberty and order. Being assem-

bled in council, they felt a disposition to adopt every reasonable method, before they countenanced the revival of the congregational church. In pursuance of this wish, they sent the following message to a committee of the church, who were in session.

“ The council now convened at the house of Capt. WILLIAM BROWN, for the purpose of advising the aggrieved brethren, and if they shall think expedient, of assisting in the organization of a church, now request of the committee of the church, under the late care of the Rev. Mr. WORCESTER, that they would come forward, and offer any objections against that procedure, which they may think important.”

NATHANIEL THAYER, *Scribe.*

To Deacon KENDALL BOUTELL, a member of the church committee.

Fitchburg, September 21, 1803.

To this request the council received the subsequent reply.

“ The committee of the church of Christ in Fitchburg have received the request of the council, now convened in this town, that the committee “ would come forward, and offer any objections against their proceeding in the organization of a church,” beg leave with all deference to observe, that they are incompetent to determine, whether they have any objections to offer or not, till they are officially ascertained what sort of a church the council

contemplate to organize, upon what principles, and of what persons ; and whether those persons be members of this church or not.”

In behalf of the committee,

K. BOUTELL.

To the Moderator of the council now convened in Fitchburg.

Fitchburg, September 21, 1803.

This we exhibit as a sample of the *deference*, the *accommodation*, and the *conciliatory temper* generally manifested by the church. When a council, formed of congregational churches, was assembled to organize a church, “ what sort of a church ” was it probable they would organize ? Could it be imagined, they would encourage a Roman Catholic or any other church not founded on congregational principles ? Could charity suppose, they would countenance a church, formed upon any “ principles,” but those inculcated in the gospel ? After the controversy had so long disturbed the peace of this town, and this subject had been so often discussed, could it be believed, that the committee were ignorant “ of the persons,” who were to form this church ? Receiving this answer as proof of the want of an accommodating spirit, the council resolved to support those, who expressed a tender attachment to the ancient covenant. After hearing an appropriate prayer and sermon, the result of council was publicly read.

FITCHBURG, *September 20, 1803.*

In pursuance of letters missive from aggrieved members of the church in Fitchburg, a council, consisting of the following churches, assembled at the house of Captain WILLIAM BROWN.

Leominster, Rev. Francis Gardner, Deacon David Wilder ; *Shrewsbury*, Rev. Joseph Sumner, Deacon William Knowlton ; *Acton*, Rev. Moses Adams, Brother Thomas Noyes ; *Groton*, Rev. Daniel Chaplin, Deacon Samuel Rockwood ; *Worcester*, Rev. Aaron Bancroft, Deacon Nathan Heard ; *Littleton*, Rev. Edmund Foster, Deacon John Wood ; *Lancaster*, Rev. Nathaniel Thayer, Brother Benjamin Wyman ; *Lunenburg*, Rev. Timothy Flint, Deacon Benjamin Goodrich, Brother Josiah Sterns ; *Shirley*, Brother Wallis Little.

The council formed by choosing the Rev. FRANCIS GARDNER, Moderator ; Rev. NATHANIEL THAYER, Scribe.

The Rev. Moderator opened the council by an address to the throne of divine grace.

The council continued in session by adjournments until the afternoon of September 21st, and after serious deliberation, voted to recognize the aggrieved brethren as a church, and unanimously agreed to publish as the grounds of this vote the following result.

The council, having attended to the communications of the aggrieved brethren in

Fitchburg, find that they have fully complied with the result of the mutual council, convened in August, 1802, and that they have in the spirit of candor and peace, repeatedly requested of the church that decision on their part, which might restore the harmony of the church, and reinstate them in their standing in it. But the council with regret learn that the church by a formal vote have refused to accept the result of said council, and in this way to terminate the divisions, that have existed.

In the opinion of this council the aggrieved have taken all the steps known in the usages of our churches to obtain satisfaction from their brethren.

In the opinion of this council it is also evident, that the church, lately under the care of the Rev. Mr. WORCESER have, by their rejection of said result, and by the introduction of a new form of covenant and articles of faith, with which many of the serious members of the society, disposed to join the church cannot in conscience comply, essentially changed their constitution, and violated the great principles of congregational government.

This council are therefore constrained from a sacred regard to the result of a mutual council, the ultimate decision in all ecclesiastical proceedings, from a sincere regard to the interest of religion in this town, and from compassion to the situation of the aggrieved, cut

off from the exercise of Christian communion, to recognize them as a church.

Now therefore, in the fear of God, and influenced by an anxious concern for the respectability of the Christian church, and for the best interest of the Redeemer's Kingdom, we do hereby express our solemn purpose, to view, and to support the aggrieved brethren, with all who shall regularly join them in the observance of Christian institutions, as the "*Congregational Church in Fitchburg*," who have renewed the covenant used in the church, previously to the introduction of the new confession of faith and form of covenant.

Now, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we exhort you to walk before God and man in all good carriage and behavior. And we pray the great Head of the church, to strengthen and establish you in the faith and order of the gospel, that at his second appearance you may be present before him with exceeding joy.

FRANCIS GARDNER, *Moderator*.

A true copy. Attest,

NATHANIEL THAYER, *Scribe*.

The other church, finding themselves a decided minority in the corporation, and that no measures nor persuasions could influence voters to advance their views, they pursued the plan of settling a minister by themselves. After hearing him on probation, they elected the Rev. TITUS THEODORE BARTON. Re-

ceiving from him an affirmative answer, they invited a number of churches to assist in the instalment. When assembled, a committee appointed by the town, appeared, and presented a protest against their proceeding. As this gives an impartial view of the irregularity of the design, we have thought it our duty to incorporate it with the statement we now publish.

To the ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL which may be convened for the installation of the Rev. TITUS T. BARTON over an association nominally HOPKINSIAN a minor part of this corporation.

We the town of Fitchburg, in town meeting assembled, protest against your proceeding to said installation; and as the basis of this protest we assign the following reasons, derived from civil and ecclesiastical law.

The Constitution of the Commonwealth, while it gives the utmost consistent indulgence to the rights of conscience, empowers the Legislature to require every man's attendance on the public worship of Almighty God, and to enact laws for the regulation of religious societies. The laws thus made in pursuance of constitutional authority, contemplate every town, undivided into parishes, precincts, districts and religious societies, as a corporation for the management of all ecclesiastical concerns. The town of Fitchburg is of that description, and are now engaged

in a course of regular proceeding for the settlement of a gospel minister. The persons over whom the installation of the Rev. TITUS T. BARTON is proposed, are a minor part of that corporation ; the induction into office of a minister over the minority of a regularly constituted society is, we deem, an unwarrantable and unprecedented invasion of the liberties and rights of the majority ; it is, we conceive, in direct violation of that fundamental rule in all our institutions, that the majority, conforming to the original principles of the compact, shall govern ; and it is a measure flagrantly irregular, and completely disorganizing.

Every citizen of the Commonwealth is a member of a religious society, constituted such by law. If an inhabitant of a town, or a resident in any parish, precinct or district, it is within these geographical limits, or within a distinct society specially incorporated, that the civil power authorizes the use, and protects him in the enjoyment of all the rights and privileges appertaining to public worship. But if he dissents from the regularly constituted society in which he is included, he may attach himself to any other "sect or denomination," and on his producing a formal certificate of his attendance on a public teacher of that other "sect or denomination," he may have the tax assessed upon him transferred to his own instructor. But for a number of

dissenters to combine against the will of the body politic, of which they are a part, and in the settlement of a minister to assume and exercise the rights given exclusively to the majority, is a proceeding subversive of all order, civil and religious. And the spirit by which such a combination is actuated, is fitly described in a publication from the church lately under the pastoral care of the Rev. SAMUEL WORCESTER, entitled "Facts and Documents"—"A spirit disposed to trample on all order and authority, civil and ecclesiastical, and to introduce unbounded licentiousness and confusion into church and state."

To illustrate the truth of these sentiments, we advert to the transactions of the same church when last assembled under the authority of this corporation to manage our civil and ecclesiastical concerns. At a meeting of the town, on the fifth of the present month, the said church protested against their future taxation for any religious purposes, and presented a certificate for their exemption, and immediately after combined their whole strength, against the majority, in a design to prevent the raising of money for supplying the pulpit. The mere statement of this conduct is sufficient to expose its contrariety to law, reason, and social order. This instance is not solitary. An opposition, similar in every respect, has been frequently exhibited during the last three years. Such disorderly

conduct has raised a "spirit" in the town, that will not probably be allayed with any thing short of the peaceable submission, for the future, of the minority ; or of their separation from the town in such manner as the laws prescribe.

The Constitution considers every man in the two fold character, of a disciple of Christ, and a subject of civil government : As free to worship God, according to the dictates of his conscience, but as acquiring that freedom by his conformity to such regulations as the preservation and tranquility of society require.

The call of the Rev. Mr. BARTON, and, as we understand, the letters missive for your convocation were in the name of the "First Church of Christ in Fitchburg." This rank it cannot at present claim in a legal point of view, for being unassociated with any incorporated body, it is a society wholly unknown in law ; and that it could not claim it, we think evident from the following considerations. The statute of the Commonwealth restricts to churches connected and associated with corporations, legal protection in the use, exercise and enjoyment of their accustomed privileges respecting divine worship. And where parishes, precincts, and other corporations are formed in a town, the law expressly declares that the old town shall be the first or principal parish, which would give the rank

of first or principal church to the church connected and associated therewith. So far as ecclesiastical authority can settle this question of precedence, we conceive that the church assuming the distinction of the First Church of Christ in Fitchburg, are schismatics from the first regularly established church in this place, and that, therefore, your recognition of them under that assumed title would be unwarranted by any ecclesiastical judicatory.

Upon these considerations we protest against your recognizing the church, nominally Hopkinsian, under the appellation of the *first*.

In connexion with this solemn act, and these reasons for it, the town of Fitchburg, respectfully and unequivocally assure the reverend council, that they have not the least aversion to the settlement of a minister by any portion of the people constituted a religious society according to law. Without such constitution there cannot be, in this Commonwealth, a *society* authorised to make an efficient settlement of, and provide legal support for a minister. Where a settlement is attempted by a minority with party views, and especially with avowed intentions of becoming the majority, the peace of society is interrupted and its laws transgressed.

They who sustain the high commission of public instructors in the divine law, should themselves observe, and enjoin upon others

the observance of the laws which protect and preserve an orderly community.

A true copy from the records,

JOSEPH FOX, *Town Clerk.*

The council, after deliberating, surmounted the difficulties thrown in their way by the constitution of the Commonwealth, by the principles on which congregational churches are established, and by the rules of the gospel, and voted to proceed to installation.^f

When we recollect, that this church in so disorderly manner have obtained a minister, and that the Rev. Mr. WORCESTER was an industrious promoter of their views, we cannot but call the reader's attention to the sentiments of that gentleman and his church.* "If it might be at any time suitable for churches to comply with a request for a council, from persons, under the peculiar circumstances of those now in question, yet the present is, in our view, a most unhappy time for such a precedent. The awful spirit, which is prevalent, and in progress at the present day, is well known—a spirit disposed to trample on all order and authority, civil and ecclesiastical, and to introduce unbounded licentiousness and confusion into church and state. We deeply regret, that in justice to ourselves and to the injured cause of truth, order and religion, we are obliged to state,

* Page 52 of their publication.

that this spirit has been most conspicuous in the conduct of those, who have called for a council on this occasion." May not the instruction be pertinently addressed to them, "physicians, heal yourselves?" Ye who warn others not to patronize the subverters of civil and ecclesiastical order, do ye dare to introduce a precedent, which if generally practised upon, would destroy the civil constitution, overthrow the churches, and annihilate all social and ecclesiastical order?

Before we close, some few remarks are necessary, to justify the conduct of the town in excluding Mr. WORCESTER from the meetinghouse. An idea, that it would interrupt the order of our narrative induced us to allot this place for its introduction. The characters of the clergy are also implicated by the representation in the pamphlet for coming themselves, and for encouraging candidates to come and take possession of the pulpit.*

The settlement of Mr. WORCESTER was upon this express condition. "If it should so happen in the course of his ministry, in Fitchburg, that difficulty should arise on his part, which should prove a grievance to this church and people, which may give in their opinion just occasion of complaint against him, prejudicial to the peace and happiness of this church and people, they shall have a

right to dismiss him from his pastoral relation to this church and people, with the advice of a mutual council.2" It is evident, this clause is not so definite and unequivocal as it might have been. The generally received opinion was, that it designated a majority of the corporation. Whenever it should so happen, that they had real cause of dissatisfaction with the Pastor, it was supposed, that it reserved to them the right of insisting on a mutual council, to ratify his dismissal. The church and congregation acting jointly in this business is far from being a novel idea.

From the life of Doctor COLMAN is inferred a similar sentiment.* He was not for confining the right of choosing a minister to the communicants alone, but thought that every baptised adult person of sober and good conversation, who contributed to the maintenance of one, should have a vote in electing. It appeared to him, that this order was right and good, founded in nature, and confirmed by apostolic practice, and through the first 300 years of the primitive church. Accordingly when his people were about choosing him a colleague in 1715, he uttered the following words in a speech to them. "As to the apostolical times and records, there are but two elections, that occur to my remembrance, and they were both made by the free vote of all the disciples together, in the pres-

* Page 109.

ence of the apostles.”* The Christian society in Brattlestreet, Boston, of which he was minister, perceiving that the sentiments were reasonable and apostolical, adopted the principle, and have continued in the practice to the present day. If Christians should act unitedly in the election of a minister, there is certainly equal reason for this union in the dismission.

The committee directed by the town to agree with Mr. WORCESTER and his church in electing the mutual council, wished as far as possible, to become accommodated to their views. With this disposition they entered on the business. In the commencement, the privilege and right of the town was nullified by the principle insisted on. Instead of acting as two parties, the church, to accomplish their views, insisted on three. Their arrangement is given by Mr. WORCESTER in his statement at the close of “Facts and Documents,” &c. “One of the churches of which the council might consist, should be agreed upon between the committee of the town, the committee of the church, and myself; that one half of the rest should be mutually agreed upon between the two committees, and that the other half should be left to my choice.”† As the church were wholly devoted to Mr. WORCESTER’S interest, what right did this

* The first election is referred to in Acts, Chap. i. ver. 15, &c. The second is in Acts, Chap. vi.

† Page 109.

arrangement secure to the town ? Only the pitiable privilege of choosing one of their judges out of four. Had they not too sad experience of the doings of a council, in which they had no choice again to try the experiment ? Perceiving Mr. WORCESTER and his church inflexible in their oppression, the only alternative, which they reluctantly embraced, was to vote his dismissal. The neighboring clergy, hearing of these efforts and ill success approved the decision, and viewed the inhabitants as proper objects of ministerial assistance and support.

Fellow Christians,

We have now accomplished our plan. On many sentiments and articles in the publication of the church we thought it unnecessary to comment. They carry with them their own refutation. We have carefully guarded against giving to any facts a high coloring, and was it necessary we could have substantiated our statement in all its particulars by additional and solemn evidence. We have committed no intentional error. So far as upon a serious review we can discover, we feel ready to pledge ourselves for the fairness and authenticity of our representations. We think none, who know our situation, will accuse us of being actuated by a spirit of resentment or of revenge. We have wished to avoid every symptom of asperity, and to frame our narrative in the spirit of meekness and of truth.

Although our sincerity and rectitude are implicated by the statement of the church, had they consented to meet us on any principle, which could be justified by reason and the gospel, we should have rejoiced to forgive their intention, and to embrace them in the arms of our charity. Being now a regular church, which can enjoy unmolested our Christian privileges, we offer them our sincere and affectionate wishes for their spiritual improvement and happiness. We assure them and the world, that no opportunity shall pass, without testifying to them our regard by every charitable and Christian office. We indulge the joyous hope, that the time will come, when they shall cease to view their speculations as the fundamentals of religion, or essential to the salvation of other Christians ; when the partition wall, which they have designed to raise between Hopkinsians and honest believers of other persuasions shall be removed ; when the “ charity, which never faileth,” shall warm every heart, and when all Christians, who sincerely believe in God, and in his son Jesus Christ, shall join in one common effort, to repress every unfriendly and illiberal sentiment, and to advance the great interests of virtue and of piety.

NOTES, &c.

Referring to the foregoing Work, and arranged according to their alphabetical references.

[*a] This certifies, that we the subscribers were appointed May 11th, 1801, to treat with the Rev. SAMUEL WORCESTER about the terms on which he should be dismissed. We felt disposed to condescension by the ardent desire for a dismissal, which he expressed, however hard it may be to reconcile this desire with later transactions. We were led by him to believe, that no allegations would be brought by him, before the council against the town, or any of its inhabitants. These considerations induced us to submit the election of the council to him and his friends. We were convinced of our receiving his ideas correctly, as the church did not allow the time for bringing allegations, which Mr. WORCESTER had prescribed.

JOSEPH FOX, ISRAEL TURNER, ASA BROY, DAVID BOUTELL, EDWARD DURANT,	}	Committee.
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Fitchburg, — 1804.

[b] The reader is informed that the proceedings of the church were in a private room at the Rev. Mr. WORCESTER's house. The request was, that this case might be canvassed and decided in the meetinghouse, the usual and most proper place for so important a transaction. It is also to be noticed, that when these requests were made, the pastor, without even asking the opinion of the church, peremptorily refused them. He will do well to consider, whether in this he acted agreeably to the spirit of the apostle Peter's instruction to Christian ministers, not to conduct as "being lords over God's heritage." The precipitancy of the church in this instance, seems without example in church history. On the eighth of April, E. Durant was summoned to appear before the body the succeeding day. He obeyed the summons. Without admonition or a deliberate consultation on his requests, and even in presence of the delinquent, a vote of excommunication was passed. Did they recollect, that this sentiment was on record? "Do nothing rashly."

[c] An inconsistency has been suggested between this and the succeeding vote. Where is this inconsistency? The original church had by the new order of things suffered a temporary annihilation. The dissenting members held their relation to the Christian family, but had no positive connexion with any particular church. Until the congregational church was revived, and the members renewed the covenant, to which they formerly consented, it was perfectly correct to say, that "there neither is or has been more than one church in Fitchburg."

Not less consistent were the council in voting that "the new forms in the manner in which they were introduced, cannot be

NOTES, &c.

considered as binding upon those, who never consented to them." Mr. WORCESTER and his church had entered upon new ground. A covenant, to be binding, must be a matter of voluntary consent. There is yet, and it is hoped there will always be too much liberty and reason in Christendom, to tolerate any individuals or bodies of Christians in arbitrarily inflicting censures on members, who are not subject to their jurisdiction. Who that has any knowledge of ecclesiastical government will pretend, that the dissenters from the new forms were yet amenable to the body, which had changed their constitution in the manner we have described. The supposed contradiction of these votes must therefore be the offspring of a superficial or warped judgment.

[d] The reader will remark, that the mutual council, while they say, that "the Rev. Mr. WORCESTER and the church were uniform in their proposals for a mutual council," are cautious in withholding their approbation of the principles, which they *uniformly* maintained.

It is also to be remembered, that the evidences of unfairness and duplicity we have stated relating to the first council in June, we were not prepared to exhibit to the mutual council. Without these they perhaps wanted proof, sufficient to warrant crimination.

[e] In connexion with this conduct of Mr. W. the reader is desired to peruse the following detail of the proceedings of the church which had been under his care. After receiving a negative answer from the Rev. Mr. WORCESTER, they served the town committee, appointed to supply the pulpit, with the following vote of their body.

"At a regular church meeting, Voted, that the church will proceed with the town in candidating, in order to settle a gospel minister, in the same way as though no difficulty had arisen heretofore.

EBENEZER THURSTON, *Clerk.*

In pursuance of this vote a candidate was obtained. The church invited him to be their minister. A majority of the town opposed the measure. As if the vote which was passed implied no obligation, because the inhabitants dared to use the liberty of acting their own judgment, the church, apparently in a fit of resentment, without making another effort, assembled by themselves. They invited candidates to preach to them, and continued their separation till the settlement of their present minister. Thus have they raised an insurmountable barrier to a reunion.

[f] In their result, which is desultory, and contains nothing of use in the present narrative, the expression *twice* appears, that it passed "without a dissenting voice." Is it possible, there could be a design to lead the reader to a false judgment, that the result was unanimous? We ask whether the Rev. Pastors of the churches in Ashby and Townsend, and whether a delegate from Mason did not withhold their votes and their approbation? If this be true, the vote, to the honor of those gentlemen, was not unanimous, if they did not formally dissent.

NOTES, &c.

PROTEST against the RESULT of the MUTUAL COUNCIL. See page 54.

We the Subscribers, actuated as we hope by a sense of duty to GOD, to this Church, and to the Church of CHRIST at large, are constrained to remonstrate and enter our PROTEST against the following Vote of the council, namely.

VOTED, "That the persons who have been excommunicated from this church, are on regular communional ground."

The tendency of this vote, in our opinion, is highly dangerous and destructive to the cause of true religion. The reasons we offer in support of our opinion are the following :

1st. Because delinquent members are thereby rescued from the discipline which Christ has lodged with his church, and requires them to exercise.

2d. Because a door is thereby opened for communion in special ordinances, to persons openly irreligious and profane.

To illustrate this alarming truth, we adduce the following fact, which has not, to our knowledge, been controverted. By the joint testimony of two witnesses, it was proved that one person who had been excommunicated was apt to be profane on public occasions, and likewise in more private circles, when he was provoked ; and it is worthy of particular notice that this testimony was given by persons, called by himself to substantiate before the council, the goodness of his moral character.

3d. Because some of the excommunicated, during the process of discipline, acknowledged their connexion with, and accountability to the church ; whom in open contempt of the authority of Christ they refused to hear.

4th. Because the persons in question withdrew themselves from public worship and special ordinances, on the specious pretence that the church by the introduction of new articles of faith and form of covenant, had infringed their rights of conscience, although they did freely acknowledge, and although it was clearly proved, during the public hearing, that the articles contained nothing unscriptural ; that the church never did require them to adopt the new forms, nor were they disciplined by them, but by the former covenant to which they had personally consented.

5th. Because the excommunicated, " Being solemnly impressed with a sense of duty to God and religion," as they expressed themselves, signed a compact to pay according to their polls and estates to the support of such teachers as a society formed in Fitchburg on the avowed principles of universal salvation should approve, and thereby violated their solemn vows and covenant engagements with their brethren.

Such are the persons, whom the empledged vote of this ecclesiastical council, has placed on regular communional ground, and

NOTES, &c.

such are the offences which in the view of said council are no sufficient bar to fellowship and communion in the church of Christ. But if open profanity ; if contempt of the authority which Christ has given to his church ; if flagrant violation of their own most solemn vows ; if publicly embracing and reducing to practice, principles, which, in their consequences destroy all distinction between the righteous and the wicked ; between such as serve God, and such as serve him not : If these and other offences persisted in to final excommunication, under the compassionate and benevolent exercise of gospel discipline, do not remove the offenders from regular communional ground, it is difficult for us to ascertain that irregularity, which places its subjects beyond the reach of Christian charity and communion.

SAMUEL NILES,
JONATHAN STRONG,
WALTER HARRIS,
SAMUEL BURNAM,
BARNABAS CLARK,
ELEAZAR WHITMAN.

The futility of this highly colored remonstrance will appear from a few remarks on the reasons, which support it.

In answer to the first reason we say, that delinquent members were not rescued from the discipline of the church, neither were they to be patronized any longer than they were deprived of an impartial hearing and decision of their case by a mutual council.

The force of the second reason, that persons openly irreligious and profane were by the vote of the council considered as proper subjects of Christian communion, will appear from this circumstance. The person, against whom this was solely aimed, on making concessions similar to what he had before made, was admitted to the communion of the church which had denounced him, and is still a regular member of their body.

In answer to the third reason we say, that some of the excommunicants acknowledged their accountability to the church no longer than they remained ignorant of their peculiar situation, and plead their ignorance of ecclesiastical affairs as an excuse for this:

One particular of the fourth reason we positively deny, and challenge any member who signed the protest, to produce sufficient evidence, that "the persons in question" believed that the confession of faith contained no unscriptural articles. We also trust to the remarks in our narrative, to disprove the power of the church to discipline by the one covenant or the other, as they found expedient.

Who will believe, that after the concession made to the church in presence of *these remonstrants*, respecting the forming of the "Universal Christian Society," so much uncharity could have been exercised ? Does not the benevolent Savior instruct us, if a brother repent, it is our duty to forgive him, even till seventy times seven ? Do the Rev Mr WORCESTER and his church, with the signers of this protest, believe it too much condescension in them to practise this forgiveness in a solitary instance ?

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